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African Americans on the Great Plains: An Anthology

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Race also surfaces as a prominent theme in essays examining specific national campaigns. Richard S. Fogarty analyzes French posters that simultaneously praised contributions to the war efforts by non-white colonial soldiers while denigrating them as primitive "other." The posters reinforced racial prejudices and stereotypes and revealed that the French debt to colonial soldiers had limits. Jennifer D. Keene's comparison of posters made by African Americans with those produced for them by the government reveals a dialog between the government and the African American community on the meanings of service. Both government and privately produced posters emphasized a romanticized image of war in which each soldier made a difference, but Keene notes that the African American posters explicitly linked the struggle against Germany with the need for an interracial democracy at home.

Finally, editor Pearl James asserts that the multiple and often contradictory representations of women in U.S. posters "functioned as instruments of the changes affecting that status" (275). Critical of earlier scholarship that takes a less sanguine view, James is more convincing in arguing that posters offered ways of imagining changing women's roles than actually changing behavior. She offers an example of women's agency that promoted food conservation in Iowa by distributing posters and giving talks to local groups.

I have noted the contributions of essays that address race and gender, but the breadth of essay topics includes Russian folk art, French schoolgirls' poster art, depictions of the wounded, and the use of medieval iconography. Readers will be left to ponder the extent to which posters reflected popular views and understanding of the war, or the degree to which they influenced beliefs and lived experiences of people in a time of total war. It is just as important for readers to consider the ways poster art influenced the construction of memories of the war that remain salient in the twenty-first century.

African Americans on the Great Plains: An Anthology, edited by Bruce A. Glasrud and Charles A. Braithwaite. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. vii, 404 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 paper.

Reviewer Michael J. Lansing is assistant professor of history and director of environmental studies at Augsburg College. His research and writing have focused on issues of race and gender in the history of the western United States.

This collection of essays, all of which first appeared in the *Great Plains Quarterly*, brings together a wide range of subjects related to African American life on the Great Plains. The editors define the Great Plains

broadly, including Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Arkansas as well as the Canadian prairie provinces. Topics as varied as settlement, military service, race relations, civil rights organizing, migrations, clubs and societies, literature, arts, and music all find a home in this anthology.

The dearth of histories devoted to African American experiences in the region makes this book significant. Essays that move beyond stereotypical examinations of buffalo soldiers or black churches ensure that readers encounter less familiar stories. Even those chapters that focus on black experiences in the army or African American religion offer new and deeper insights. Especially useful pieces include Shawn Leigh Alexander's essay on the emergence of branches of the Afro American Council in Kansas during the 1890s; the transnational approach offered by R. Bruce Shepard in his research on black migrations to Canada in the early 1900s; Richard M. Breaux's examination of artistic movements among black university students in the Midwest from the 1910s to 1940; an essay by Tom Jack that analyzes exactly how gospel music spread through African American churches in Omaha during the 1930s; Jean Van Delinder's piece on black activism in Topeka before the famous 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case; and Ronald Walters's work on the sit-in movements across Kansas and Oklahoma that predated the more famous student sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960.

Despite the editors' efforts to expand their definition of the Great Plains, only brief mentions of Iowa appear. In his fascinating essay on black university students, Breaux puts the achievements of numerous University of Iowa alumni, including Lulu Merle Johnson, Elmer E. Collins, and Margaret Walker, into a broader context of African American cultural and artistic foment between World War I and World War II. Meanwhile, Walters rightly concludes that northern newspaper editors — including the *Des Moines Register's* Lauren Soth — too often gave over their front pages to news of civil rights struggles in the South while burying local civil rights struggles in their back pages. More typically, in his essay on black soldiers at Nebraska's Fort Niobrara, Thomas R. Buecker only hints that several companies of the 25th Infantry Regiment found their way to Fort Des Moines in 1903. Michael Johnson's essay on Era Bell Thompson's *American Daughter* (1946) simply notes that she completed her college degree at Morningside in Sioux City.

Nonetheless, the numerous parallels between the experiences of African Americans in states such as Nebraska and Kansas and those in Iowa in the years after the Civil War make this anthology useful. For instance, the significance of local chapters of national civil rights orga-

nizations in black urban enclaves across the area cannot be denied — as Bruce Fehn and Robert Jefferson’s recent article on the Black Panther Party in Des Moines in the Winter 2010 issue of this journal suggests. Furthermore, Joseph V. Hickey’s attempt to understand the creation of rural black communities such as Pap Singleton’s Dunlap Colony in Kansas offers insights into similar migrations that brought African Americans from the South to the coal mines of Muchakinock and Buxton just a few years later.

Unfortunately, none of the essays considers black history on the Great Plains before the Civil War. More important, few of the pieces carefully consider the experiences of black women. Finally, the lack of maps, graphs, or illustrations is frustrating. For instance, photographs of the art produced by Aaron Douglas would greatly enrich Audrey Thompson’s essay on that leading visual artist of the Harlem Renaissance. Despite these flaws, this collection belongs on the shelf of every reader with an interest in African American history or the history of the Great Plains and Midwest.

ACT: The First Fifty Years, 1959–2009. Iowa City: ACT, Inc., 2009. ix, 161 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes.

Reviewer John Rury is professor of education and (by courtesy) history at the University of Kansas. His research and writing have focused on issues in higher and secondary education.

This book is a “house history” of one of the nation’s premier educational testing and assessment organizations, and displays many of the virtues of such exercises along with a few of the pitfalls. Although written in an authoritative voice and with command of relevant documentary evidence, no author is named. Instead, the book appears to represent an official, institutionally sanctioned account of ACT’s first half-century, documenting its many successes and the various challenges it faced. Composed in the style of a research monograph, complete with footnotes, it strikes a scholarly pose in a glossy, coffee-table format. The resulting narrative is rather dense at times, filled with details about programs and initiatives over the years, but it does provide an informative look inside this widely known Iowa institution.

There can be little doubt that ACT is important to the American educational system, and it has extended its reputation and influence dramatically across five decades. Started by University of Iowa psychometrician E. F. Lindquist in 1959, it expanded upon a tradition of examining the state’s high school students in various subjects. Feeling constrained in one state, Lindquist and his various collaborators built